

PLAISTOW LISTENING SESSION

August 22, 2013, 7:00 pm, Plaistow Town Hall

NHDOT: Mark Sanborn (MS), Patrick Herlihy (PH), Shelley Winters (SW)

HDR Engineering: Ron O'Brien (RO), John Weston (JW), Pamela Yonkin (PY)

Town of Plaistow: Shawn Fitzgerald (SF), Town Manager

Approximately 50 people attended the listening session.

Summary of comments

Introduction by Mark Sanborn: (MS)

- Early public meeting because of public debate related to this rail project
- Will assure that study information reflects the needs and interests of the people in the community
- Overall discussion of history of the project that included acknowledgement that current project effort will follow established federal project review and assessment procedures
- Noted that because are at the very beginning of the study, won't be able to answer many of the questions at this time
- Only the progression of the study has been approved – no approval beyond completion of the study has been given
- Westford Homes and Penn-Box sites are off the list for consideration of the layover facility
- Local support required to be "feasible"

Project Description by Ron O'Brien (RO)

- Emphasized that study team is at the very beginning of the project
- Noted presentation limited to a description of the project and geographical limits
- Potential extension of commuter service that currently goes to Haverhill out to Plaistow
- Noted that beyond MA the railroad is owned by Pan Am Railways
- MBTA and Pam Am Railways have agreement that would allow for commuter trains to be operated to Plaistow but not beyond Plaistow town limits
- 12 month major activity timeline
- Looking forward to listening to comments

Overview of Process of Study by John Weston (JW)

- Presented framework of the study and the timeline
- Progressed with oversight of Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Following FTA guidance for plan and design a transit project used nationwide
- Study will produce an Environmental Assessment in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that include public information and input
- Alternatives will be considered that will include a no-build alternative
- Noted that there will be follow up meetings
 - 3 public meetings will be held to present information of study efforts
 - Community Advisory Committee will be established – will meet on a regular basis and be open to the public

Public Comments

Public Comment: She lives approximately 1,000 feet from actual railroad tracks; wants train station at park and ride and wants to take day trips into Boston. Not too convinced about layover station, but would like the railroad station.

Public Question: How many NH residents (specifically Plaistow residents) will be employed during the study? There should be some consideration of employment of Plaistow residents.

Answer (RO): No one on HDR team lives in Plaistow. Up to 20 people working on the study.

Public Question: Under Task 4, Ridership Forecasts – indicates we will review. He is looking at page 8 of the Benefit Cost Assessment (BCA) of related project grant application.

Answer (Ron): Ridership of referenced previous BCA done by MBTA. The BCA was done by our company. No data was created; HDR used existing data.

Public Question: Feels that Plaistow has already indicated their displeasure with this project. Doesn't understand why we are looking at this again, just because it is potentially federally funded.

Answer (MS): NHDOT was directed by the town (MOU with Plaistow) to pursue this study. Money used is Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program funds administrated by FTA, despite being all taxpayer dollars, and it can only be used for a study of a commuter rail service. These dollars, if not spent on this

project, could not go into fixing bridges, for example. MS doesn't feel comfortable speaking to the "wishes of the town."

Answer (Shawn Fitzgerald): Welcomed all. Acknowledged that Selectman John Sherman and Selectwoman Joyce Ingerson were in attendance. The ballot question posed to the town was "Would you support a layover facility in Plaistow?" The study considers "How do we feel about a train station?" Shawn wants to get as much info as they can so that the townspeople can make an informed decision based on the results of the study. He is happy to meet with anyone to discuss this project.

Public Question: How many people gave you this (direction for the study)?

Answer (Mark): Board of Selectman, who you elected.

Public Question: Two-thirds of the town residents say they don't want this, but we are taking taxpayer money to study something no one wants. Is the essence that the MBTA will be in NH? They know they have some options for rail to the south. It is only 5-6 miles away, which isn't a huge distance. Concerned that the real end game is Lowell-Concord extension. Do we need to take the layover facility so that the MBTA can build the line to Concord? Is this what this project is about? Who would pay for construction and maintenance if this gets approved?

Answer (MS): Two ongoing studies in NH are related to rail. One is the NH Capital Corridor Alternatives Analysis and Service Development Plan (FRA and FTA funded) – examining transit, bus, intercity rail, commuter rail from NH to MA. This travels on a different line than what we have in Plaistow. MA interest involves the fact that they have an inefficient line that ends in Bradford. They have capacity issues in layover facility and it affects their operations. Part of the study is considering how to fix this. MBTA would provide a real service to Plaistow. The statement that studies appear to be being "mixed" is not true. They are not. No trade off. We'll provide ridership, cost, BCA and within that economic development, sustainability assessment. MS emphasizes that Plaistow will get X for Y investment and the communities will have to decide what they want to do. How much it costs and where funding comes from will come out of the study. Can't identify this right now but it will be available at conclusion of the study.

Public Question: Where would advisory committee come from?

Answer (MS): HDR and NHDOT and Board of Selectmen in Plaistow and Atkinson, RPC, etc. and MA will be consulted. Wide variety of different stakeholders on both sides of the border will be included. If you are not identified as someone to be on the committee, every meeting is open to the public and will include public comment.

Public Question: What are potential layover site locations? Looking for minimal to no impact to Plaistow residents.

Answer (RO): We will be looking at this. HDR has not looked at sites in any detail. We will look everywhere along line between Haverhill and ends of study limit. We will have these discussions as we go through the process to better understand impacts. Have not identified any sites yet.

Answer (JW): Typically we look at big long list of things we consider. Top on list is impacts including wetlands impacts, floodplain impacts, and noise/vibration. The last one will be the big one. We have a process that measures existing noise and volumes of noise generated by idling or trains passing by. The impact on traffic, air quality, bugs/bunnies, etc. as well as land use impacts. This will go through a federal review.

Answer (RO): These are defined by federal agencies. These are established procedures.

Answer (MS): Mentioned environmental justice. A location won't be chosen without folks in neighborhood being able to talk about the impacts. Just reemphasized in last reauthorization bill.

Public Comment: Nation needs a network of high speed rail like that in Europe. This will make a huge difference to how nation fares in the world. This is important. Elephant in the room is the layover facility. His understanding is that you can't get one without the other. Idling is the huge issue (an hour before service starts). Bill is an engineer and he doesn't know of a single reason why you would have to idle for an hour. Trains need train, steam, engine oil circulating. Easily done with a track side facility where you park the locomotive. If a layover facility must be built it has to be equipped with whatever it takes to get trains started in 5 minutes and that way, they won't have 4 locomotives idling and rumbling in their neighborhood.

Public Comment: Locomotive engineer on commuter rail system from MA. There are lots of employees who travel from Plaistow to Boston. Long term effect of trains to NH would be very beneficial. Is there an ulterior motive? He says Bradford facility is completely inadequate. Today's layover yard is not Bradford. Mentioned air brake tests, etc. 40 new locomotives are energy efficient, don't leak, don't stink. Don't be afraid of a layover facility. What you see in Bradford is not what you will see in the future – minimal exhaust and vibration with new facility. It will benefit you long term.

Public Comment: Recent Plaistow resident, formerly in Haverhill. Vibration and noise from railroad station was bad enough. MBTA wants to take in revenue to meet operating costs. \$143 million in tax assessments currently. People should be aware of this.

Public Question: Re: train idling. Part of it is the requirement of an HVAC. They have to be warm enough for people to ride in. Bill is right that a lot more can be done at modern layovers. MBTA track record is not so great at some of the more modern layovers. They have had to be pushed to do that. Some of the trains are amazing and filter the air. They emit CO2 but they actually clean the air. How do we know what we get in NH when MBTA can only afford to

replace half of the fleet? How do we guarantee we don't get the worst engines here in Plaistow?

Answer (MS): Answer will come and will be part of the study.

Public Question: Not supportive of this. Freight trains are bad enough. Her house vibrates and we don't even have any layover or rail station here. Concerned about no town sewer. There would be impact on community with the installation of bathrooms at the new layover facility. Will Plaistow residents have a say in this? They feel like they need the final say. If voters choose this, she's okay with this. If she feels "railroaded," she's not okay with this. Wants bus service set up from park and ride in Plaistow into Haverhill to see who would park and take the train. She doesn't know anyone who would take the train. Could we have a station without a layover? Will eminent domain come into play? Will people be compensated for property impacts?

Answer (MS): One of the alternatives considered will be what would a rail station look like without a layover facility. In terms of decision making process, there is a state law that any public funding of any kind that is looking at passenger rail beyond planning study has to go through NH State Legislature. Any contract to implement anything would have to go through Executive Council. Lots of places in the process where they can work with their elected officials. It is possible for Plaistow residents to speak with state reps about conditions for moving forward.

Public Question: Plaistow had put together a report that said they wanted the train to come here to get the cars off the road. 500 cars off the road in 2014. Not sure where they got that number. If you want to take cars off the road, why are you allowing more businesses along Route 125. How will we research number of cars using Route 125 who are going to and from Boston? How accurate will this be in the study?

Answer (RO): While many times we will look at cars taken off the road as a metric, we want to look at this as the fact that highways are going to be congested. The reality is that when cars are taken off the road for some reason, others likely come on. The service addresses the question of congestion but doesn't necessarily reduce it. The service could provide alternatives for travel for residents of the area. Regarding ridership, we will work with MBTA with their process for estimating ridership numbers in their system. We want consistency. Exactly how we go about doing this is TBD. Some FTA models being utilized are just coming out and we want to see if they would be appropriate for this study.

Answer (MS): We are not claiming congestion solving with this project. This is looking at benefits that result with alternatives to what exists.

Public Question: Bus commuter station in Plaistow already. Going by at different times of the day there are about 15 cars there who take the bus to Boston. Why do we think they will hop the train to Boston?

Answer (SW): Lack of direct connection to Boston may be part of the reason that the bus is not being used. Bus service from Plaistow currently travels to Boston via Newburyport, MA.

Public Comment: They did windshield surveys on Route 125 and asked whether people would take a train. This is all part of the history. Park and Ride lot was studied as a bus and train station. She lives 500 feet near railroad in Atkinson. She doesn't understand why people are so surprised. You know you are buying a house near the railroad tracks when you buy it. We have been working toward passenger/commuter rail service for years. We are trying to get a sustained environment for land use and economic development. Please let the study happen. The questions are really good, but she feels like things are very one sided.

Answer (MS): Want to make sure that every voice is heard and respected.

Public Comment: Who of you goes to Boston everyday? She does every single day and she feels safe riding the existing bus, which is why she moved to NH. She referred to a news report of a knife pulled on conductor on MBTA. She feels safe on her bus. She doesn't see big need for this but she also worries about safety.

Public Comment: Comes here because he has served on a few different planning agencies. When you reintroduce a new mode of transportation, there is always a downside and it is very easy to get caught up in that. Look at the bigger picture. Don't think just about how it might hurt you. Think about how it might benefit you. Could be resale and new owner interest in rail service to Boston. Could mean the difference between selling and not selling house in timely manner. There could be reverse commute – convince a company from Boston to relocate because of commuter service. React to fact, not hearsay.

Public Comment: Her concern is one of safety. Worried about fires (as reference to recent Canadian train incident).

Public Comment: Asks that during the study we consider efficiency of service. She's ridden MBTA from Haverhill to Boston and it has been very, very slow. You need modern cars and a timely service. Current service is very slow and it chugs along.

Public Comment: Will we look at crime rate statistics with train station coming into town? People not taking the train to the South Shore.

Public Question: Looked at TIGER assessment, and it looks good. What do they gain? What traffic will come through town? Concern about fleet assumptions in TIGER BCA.

Answer (MS): TIGER was put together for second round. It will be reviewed, but do not presume that anything in there will represent the preferred alternative from this study.

Public Comment: Does not have luxury of driving car. He is legally blind and the only way he can get to the train station is his dog. He would love a train station in Plaistow. This is a study and it is new and comprehensive and will evaluate whether a train makes sense for Plaistow. New layover station will be different than the old ones. Older demographic in Plaistow and maybe they could take advantage of a train. Consider the reverse commute and opportunities for coffees shop and subsequent employment due to station area development. Students who don't drive can access Boston museums, etc. A person can get desensitized to train noise. Freight trains will continue to run. That doesn't change with a commuter rail. Take the opportunity to look at this and think with your minds not your heart.

Public Question: What are the plans to the north? Could you need two layover facilities?

Answer (MS): Will be part of the alternatives assessment. Impacts of ridership north and south will be considered. Pretty sure we won't need two layover facilities.

Public Comment: This operation that will provide alternatives started many years ago. The town has had an interest in making good decisions now and in the future. He likes the idea that there is a study that will address the negatives. He knows of noise and pollution as issues. If it doesn't work for Plaistow, it won't go. He wants to see facts and make a decision not just make a decision.

Public Comment: Highlights guidance used on planning board. Existing park and ride has 275 parking spaces. In the August 2010 BCA, we are looking at 2,500 riders in 2017 and 2,000 in 2025. BCA did not include parking demand estimate and different modes (bike, kiss and ride, walking) will be part of this study, but 300 parking spaces and 2,000 commuters is a potential issue. Concerned about car overflow. Please make sure enough parking is provided as part of each alternative considered.

Public Question: Also concerns about parking and local traffic. How people will get to facility on Westville Road? Likely impact on Main Street traffic. The warrant article that was passed was not a vote to stop the project. It only dealt with the layover facility. The issue related to it only being 4-5 miles from Plaistow Park and Ride to Haverhill station is true, but it is not doable in less than 15 minutes. 15 stoplights. Commuter could save 15 minutes off commute. The bigger concern is the stops in MA and they may not be efficient enough for us to reduce a lot of traffic. Lots of people commute to MA, but this commuter rail project may not help a lot of commuters. It depends where you work in MA. If layover is not in Plaistow, where could it be? Board of Selectman looked at the possibility of a site in Haverhill. Is part of the study to consider the financial viability of the MBTA?

Answer (JW): As projects move through the federal process, FTA checks on transit agency's viability. FTA requires each and every project receiving federal money to go through an assessment of what the financials of the agency that invests and operates the service look like. MA did pass a whole new set of transportation revenues, so MBTA looks like they are getting out from under their financial problems. We assume that the MBTA will be able to afford it as part of our study, but the FTA review of the MBTA's finances will happen during final design, the step that happens right after this process.

Answer (MS): MBTA would not agree to operate this if they didn't think they could handle this. In our process, the costs of each alternative will be determined.

Answer (RO): Our study won't look at the financial viability of MBTA specifically but FTA will be making the determination based on experience with MBTA as a whole.

Public Question: When this study is complete in about a year and information comes forward that this is viable, he can't imagine a set of circumstances where the Selectmen would move forward without the okay of the townspeople. He's very interested in the economic impacts of layover facilities and train stations. He would like to know what the property tax impacts would be because of train station and layover station being in Plaistow. Also, with respect to track rights, he understands that Pan Am agreement with MBTA to extend into Plaistow stopped at Main Street line. Is that correct?

Answer (MS): Will get back to them on property value impacts.

Answer (RO): It is not quite the town line but it is the milepost within a few hundred feet of town line.

Public Comment: 5 miles is a long ways if you are a bicyclist or walker. It's not all about kids or adults going down to Boston, there is other non-commuter traffic. Bus doesn't work for after school or weekends. Please keep an open mind on this.

Public Question: Are you saying that even if the town votes that they don't want anything to do with this, the state could say you are going to get one anyway? He feels like Plaistow is getting what Haverhill doesn't want and the state wants rail service because they want rail service.

Answer (MS): Any money spent by NH (federal or state) has to be approved by state legislature. In terms of the ability of a town vote being included in that or the ability of all the towns impacted to be included, it is all up to your elected officials. The question is really for the state reps. NHDOT does not want rail just for rail, but DOT has been directed by various elected officials to move forward with the study to look at this project at the request of the town. It has to do with the direction NHDOT has been

given by duly elected public officials. We are committed to gathering facts and information.

Answer (PH): If it comes to a point where the study is completed and there is a recommendation to go forward and Plaistow says no, he can't imagine a situation where DOT would say we want to go forward. Additionally, implementation requires a bill sponsored by state reps be submitted and approved for passenger rail to come to Plaistow.

Public Comment: What about eminent domain? MBTA is broken.

Public Comment: Several people mentioned that rail is subsidized. He just wants to remind people that highways are heavily subsidized.

Public Comment: There is no host community law to have the people to vote on whether they want a train or layover facility. He thinks they should talk to reps to see about getting host community law passed. An honest study is what everyone in the room would like. Can we get an honest study if we are relying on MBTA numbers provided by HDR who is currently working with MBTA on a number of projects? He is skeptical. HDR has been working with MBTA for past three years on this project.

Public Question: A little shocked by ridership numbers. Haverhill station never exceeded 600 riders a day. Can we discuss how we will do a ridership study? Is it independent of MBTA?

Answer (MS): Modeling is being determined and will be discussed with the public and advisory committee meetings.

Public Question: With respect to the study, is there an ombudsman that would have the opportunity to review what is done? We want Town of Plaistow to be in a good position to make decisions based on information. Trains need to be considered. I saved money on wear and tear on my car, gas, etc. using the train.

Answer (MS): DOT will review. Also talk to local and state officials about political process.

Public Question: Can we ask additional questions after this meeting? Has HDR done other studies like this?

Answer (RO): We've done a lot across the US and locally. We will do an unbiased study and we have done it before and we will use this expertise and Ron appreciates comments and we promise to be unbiased and provide the best study we possibly can.

Public Question: Surprised to hear that Pan Am would extend tracks north of Main Street. That area is single tracked. Won't they insist on double? Also concerned about train whistles at grade crossings.

Answer (RO): He thinks the extension beyond Main Street was to facilitate complete review. If more track improvements is needed, project is responsible for that. We also have to consider and provide for both freight and passenger operations.

Public Question: Is the study just NH?

Answer (RO): From Haverhill, MA north to Plaistow.

Public Question: Concerned that Plaistow will need to incur additional costs for police and other safety measures. If ridership isn't there, despite station and layover facility being built, what prevents the MBTA from not closing the station down and keeping the layover facility? What if MBTA doesn't make money at this station?

Answer (MS): There would be negotiations with MBTA that would protect the rights of a passenger station and layover station. There would be discussions and an agreement. He mentioned MBTA agreement with RI. No matter what, the service won't make money. It will be subsidized.

Public Question: Asked Downeaster whether they would participate in this service, and they were not interested unless an entire set of tracks would be built through NH. Downeaster might want to revisit if there was a station in Plaistow.

Answer (MS): Downeaster is a stakeholder and Patricia Quinn of the Downeaster will be part of the conversation. Patricia will be participating in the study.

Public Question: Wonders about snow removal protocol at current park and ride. Plows can clear a single strip and put snow on other parking places and he knows this couldn't be done with 2,000 cars in that lot and it is Important to consider.

Answer (MS): Costs and size of parking facility will be included in the alternatives. Also, the existing park and ride is not necessarily where the station is going to be located.

Request to see where two sites for layover facility have been nixed. RO identified on map Westville Home site and Pen box property

Public Comment: Encourages people to wait and see the study. Maybe you will change your mind.

Public Question: The word subsidy keeps coming up. Will this be paid by taxpayers?

Answer (MS): It will be subsidized with taxpayer dollars if the project moves forward. Funding will be considered for each alternative and will be transparent. We will say how much it costs and these are the legal options to pay for it and this is the benefit/dis-benefit. It would be public transportation that would be subsidized with tax dollars.

Public Question: How much does it cost from Haverhill to Boston?

Answer/Comment (Audience Participant): She believes it costs \$7.50.

Public Comment: Thinks that train service is a benefit for residents and businesses both. We want people to be patient and see what the studies show. If it is going to cause harm to Plaistow residents, I don't want it either.

Public Question: Let's not forget that the layover yard is part of the package.

Answer/Comment (Audience Participant): Indicates this is not a given.

Answer (MS): We will evaluate an alternative with no layover facility. He won't deny that MBTA would like a layover facility. Can say that for each alternative considered, the transportation, economic development, quality of life, environmental and other benefit/dis-benefits will be estimated and discussed.

Public Question: Question about RI station. What town is the station in and is there a layover facility there and is there ridership at that station? Was there resistance to the layover facility? She would like some sort of research done about the people who live in that area and if they feel that they have personally benefited as a town from this facility being in their back yard?

Answer (JW): Agreements go back 15 years. RI pays for capital improvements. MBTA operates service on annual basis. The capital improvement that RI made was for a layover facility in Pawtucket. This is the trade they made to operate into Providence. They made another trade where RI bought new commuter rail vehicles and MBTA operates down to Wickford Junction to get to TF Green Airport. Layover facility was an old freight yard, there were no neighbors. It was industrial zoned.

Public Comment: People in Bath wanted commuter rail to go to Bath. They got layover facility and rail station and they asked for it and they got it despite complaining now.

Public Comment: Wanted to comment on 17 year old attendee comment. Lucky enough that every place he lived had trains. 100 years ago you could take a trolley to Hampton Beach. It's good to have the possibilities and he hopes we can find a way to make it work.

PUBLIC LISTENING SESSION ADJOURNED

Related Questions and Answers

During the week of August 19, 2013, several questions and/or comments were received prior to the public Listening Session regarding the Plaistow Commuter Rail Extension Study. The questions and/or comments were similar to those addressed in the Listening Session held on August 22 at Plaistow Town Hall. Below is additional information related to the submitted questions and comments.

Stakeholder Advisory Group

The public and stakeholder involvement process for the study will include the development of a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). The makeup of the SAG will include the wide variety of stakeholders and parties that have an interest in the study process and outcome. SAG meetings will be held on a regular basis (approximately every 2 months) to review and discuss study material and provide input and advice to NHDOT and HDR on study process and analysis. All SAG meetings will be open to the public and provide a time during the meeting for public comment.

Examination of Alternatives

Consistent with Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations and the National Environmental Policy Act process, the study will include an analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives. Alternatives analyzed will include those that meet the project purpose and need, which will be developed in coordination with the Stakeholder Advisory Group.

Noise Analysis

The Study team will conduct a thorough analysis of predicted noise and vibration impacts in and around the station and layover sites. The analysis, following Federal Transit Administration guidance, will include the measurement of existing noise levels at various sites across a 24 hour period. This site specific base line data will then be used to predict noise levels based on known noise impacts from idling train locomotives. Utilizing this approach, quantitative data will be available regarding specific impacts and the locations of those impacts resulting from the construction of a train station and layover facility.

Hazardous Materials

As part of the Environmental Assessment, an environmental professional will conduct predictive analysis of the project site and properties within 1/8 mile of the site to identify recognized environmental conditions. This will include the presence or likely presence of any hazardous substances or petroleum products, or conditions that indicate an existing release, past release, or material threat of release.

Air Quality

As part of the Environmental Assessment, air quality issues will be identified generally and qualitatively in relation to Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA). Existing air quality conditions will

be identified through current published air quality data sources. Air Quality Conformity will be evaluated qualitatively that will include conditions included in the proposed project, including changes in levels of both automobile and train locomotive emissions. Emissions levels from the existing and future MBTA locomotive fleet, including older locomotives, the newer Tier 2 certified HEP engines, and the EPA Tier 3 locomotives to be delivered in 2014, will all be incorporated into the assessment.

Ridership Projections

The development of ridership estimates will be conducted in a manner approved by the Federal Transit Administration. There are currently several modeling techniques that may be acceptable to use for this study. Each of these techniques incorporate data available through previously conducted surveys to determine existing travel patterns along with trip times, travel prices along with other variables to estimate ridership on a proposed service. The study is currently in the process of determining the most accurate and cost effective technique to use in projecting ridership for the study.

Train Operations

As part of the study, HDR will develop train operating plans to identify the impacts on train operations resulting from the station and layover facility locations. This information will be incorporated into the environmental impact analysis, which will be used specifically for the noise, vibration and air quality analyzes. Furthermore, this information will be incorporated into the estimate for operating and maintenance costs, train system capacity analysis, and train coach requirements.

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